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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been increasing interest within the media and in government about young people who are spending more time in front of the television or computer than in physical activities. A 1996 conference examined these issues and addressed concerns that young people's lack of activity has a detrimental effect upon their health and long-term physical and psychological development. The conference examined some of the factors that contribute to this lack of activity among young people and actions that could be taken to improve the situation. It was suggested that the media's influence might be challenged and alternative, less sedentary lifestyles encouraged. Similarly, concern was expressed over the reduction in time allotted to physical education at all levels of schooling and the way in which traditional team sports have begun to take precedence over other types of physical activity that are of no less value and are often more enjoyable. It was concluded that a conscious effort to change attitudes and to encourage the fun side of physical activity might constitute a more effective approach. (MKA)

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*St Catharine's Conference Report No. 55*

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# YOUNG PEOPLE: FIT FOR LIFE?

## A ST CATHARINE'S CONFERENCE HELD AT CUMBERLAND LODGE OCTOBER 1996

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*Report by Claire Greenhalgh*

## Introduction

Most of us will have read about the prevalence of the 'couch potato' and rising levels of obesity among all sections of the population. This phenomenon is particularly marked among young people, where for many the joys of the computer, video and television have become more important than physical pursuits. Furthermore, many do not understand the mental, psychological and long-term health benefits to be gained from an active and healthy lifestyle. The 1996 Government-sponsored report *Raising the Game* was part of a longer-term campaign to encourage more positive attitudes towards sport, physical activity and healthy lifestyles and thus break this cycle of inactivity. It was suggested that engendering such attitudes from an early age would reduce obesity levels amongst adults and also help young people to develop life skills such as commitment, team spirit and good citizenship through inter-action with others.

Opening the conference, **Dr John Cook**, Principal of St Catharine's, acknowledged the generous contributions towards the costs of the conference which had been received from **Gardner Merchant Educational Services**, the **Department for Education and Employment** and **Mars plc**.

## 1 The Virtues of Being Active

**Elizabeth Murdoch** explored activity in its broadest sense and approached the session from an educational viewpoint, discussing the benefits to children of leading a healthy and active lifestyle.

Explanations of 'active' include quick and physical movement and quick and vigorous activity requiring the expenditure of energy. The speaker felt these were qualities which turned activity into a virtue and should be encouraged. The benefits to be gained from activity include enhanced motor development, the growth of an aesthetic awareness and of verbal and physical expression, communication and social skills and improved reasoning skills and especially self-esteem.

Motor development is about gaining increasing control of one's movement — a process we experience throughout our lives and which we rely upon daily. However, this process does not simply occur; it develops slowly and steadily through various stages of our early life and can be illustrated by the way we learn to develop a ball-throwing pattern. This is a controlled and intentional movement which reflects our mastery over the environment. It is also the basis, with other patterns, of later skill development and movement and so is crucial to a child's physical growth.

One can examine these processes through the stages of activity in a child's life. During pre-birth, the child experiences simple reflexive movement patterns. After birth, these progress to a state where movement becomes less involuntary, more organised and where there is partial control over its purpose and effect. The child experiments and begins to use actions in a more deliberate and expressive way. This process takes place in the early stages, although one must be careful not to attach too much importance to age. The next stage concerns the child's growing management of movement patterns and this usually involves running, throwing, jumping and catching.

If children fail to experience these stages, there is every possibility that they will not be able to cope with sport in later life and their skill acquisition will be poor. If children do not understand the rudiments of throwing and control over that movement, how will they be able to serve

**SUMMARY**

**In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest within the media and in government about young people who are spending more time in front of the television or computer than in active pursuits. There are concerns that such behaviour is having a detrimental effect upon their health and long-term physical and psychological development. This conference examined some of the factors which were contributing to this lack of activity among young people and the action which could be taken to improve the situation. It was suggested that the influence of the media in shaping attitudes might be challenged and alternative, less sedentary lifestyles encouraged. Similarly, concern was expressed over the reduction in time allotted to physical education at all levels of schooling, and the way in which traditional team sports had begun to take precedence over other types of physical activity which were no less valuable, and often more enjoyable. Many concluded that a conscious effort to change attitudes and to encourage the 'fun' side of physical activity may be a more effective approach.**

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at tennis for example? Such deficiencies were illustrated in an experiment performed on a group of female students entering a physical education course. At the age of eighteen, fifty per cent of them had not mastered a mature level of throwing.

Once movement patterns are mastered, sport-related phases then follow, commencing with general sporting skills and progressing to a more complex understanding of specific sport patterns. The process evolves by applying skills like throwing to different sports until it becomes a highly skilled movement. In order to progress onto this stage, usually found among secondary school pupils, children need to have been active from the primary school phase. Unfortunately, many primary schools do not have the resources to devote sufficient time and effort to this developmental process in the course of physical education lessons. While the process will occur to some extent — children are always going to be active in some way — it would be more swift and more intelligent if the teacher were there to prompt children into progressing onto the next stage.

The main benefit of being *intelligently active* in our movement is that we can modify and adapt it at will. We develop a programme of past experiences which we can draw upon and modify according to requirements of the situation. This 'store' of movements, if encouraged from an early age, will be constantly enriched as we enter adulthood. The more varied the range of movements which can be placed in this 'store', the greater the choice upon which to draw.

**The early and limited specialisation of children in sport is not recommended**

Thus the early and limited specialisation of children in sport is not recommended. It prevents the development of a full and broad range of programmes and emphasises a particular sport or activity at the expense of others. Children should be introduced to a variety of activities, even if the main purpose is not necessarily to promote fitness, as long as they are experimenting with different types of movement.

**Another virtue of an active lifestyle is the way it helps to develop qualities of expression, knowing and feeling**

Another virtue of an active lifestyle is the way it helps to develop the qualities of expression, knowing and feeling. In the speaker's own field, dance is the most crucial manifestation of this process and fosters rhythm, harmony, flow, design, pattern and expression. To experience fully these sensations, children need to be prompted by the teacher to reflect upon what the activity brings in terms of feeling and expression.

Further benefits of a range of activities include the promotion of social values and cognitive development. Social values can be enhanced by the group participation, team work and verbal and non-verbal communication. Of equal value are a sense of competition, development of useful life skills and the various cultural experiences engendered by participation and activity.

Activity and movement can also play a part in teaching about concepts such as balance with movement, leading to a better understanding of the balance of argument and balance in aesthetic appreciation of art and colour. Movement enhances understanding of body image and awareness and so is central to so many things which help us grow into physically and psychologically healthy individuals.

➤ Discussion raised a number of questions about how we balance sport and PE within the school curriculum and ensure that these two very different forms of activity are properly represented within it to the benefit of children at all stages of physical and social development.

Many felt that, despite the apparent virtues of both physical and mental activity, this is contradicted by the declining amount of time in education devoted to PE and the lack of investment in community sports grounds and pitches. The education system is now preoccupied with delivering proficiency in language, literacy and numeracy to the detriment of children's physical needs and it is an attitude which is becoming increasingly difficult to challenge. Furthermore, the administrative burden placed upon schools, the implications of local self-management combined with further limitations on the choice of subjects available to teachers is perpetuating a 'hierarchy' of subjects in which PE is rapidly losing ground to the more cerebral ones. This is occurring in spite of evidence suggesting that PE remains a favourite subject amongst primary and secondary school pupils.

A number of theories were posited to account for these developments. Some felt that bad memories of school sport were turning adults away from activity — surveys suggest that many reject it because they do not perceive themselves as 'sporty' — and hence from the opportunity to compensate for the failure to build up a 'store' of movements from an early age. Others felt that the distinction between sport and PE had become so blurred that sport is now being seen as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end — the physical education of children.

Ways of tackling the culture of inactivity in adulthood were suggested. Apart from the need to make activity 'fun' — and not to encourage over-training and obsessive approaches to physical fitness — one should emphasise the participatory, cultural and social values of activity over those of competing. Recent surveys indicate that such values are now more prevalent. In a poll conducted among young people about attitudes towards the value of sport, the top values included participation, self-esteem and self-confidence. Winning came last. This is an encouraging development for those educationists and specialists who have long expressed the view that too much emphasis upon team sports, as opposed to individual achievement, is having a disastrous effect upon young people's perception of activity and their sense of worth. Those who are made to feel physically incapable of competing often experience low self-esteem and this can subsequently influence their general attitudes to life and the adult choices they make.

## 2 Myths and Realities

**Geoff Thompson** used aspects of his own journey from humble beginnings to sporting greatness and sense of personal achievement to illustrate some of the myths and realities of sport for young people today. His distinguished sporting career fulfilled and inspired him both as a professional and as an individual and he now hopes that his work with the Youth Charter for Sport (YCS) will encourage another generation of young people to replicate the achievements of sporting rôle models like him.

The speaker came from a disadvantaged background. Born in Wolverhampton and raised in London's inner city, Geoff Thompson recalled the aggressive approach to life he developed in his early teens and how an interest in sport channelled that aggression towards a more positive and self-fulfilling activity — competitive karate. He believes he was also fortunate in the strong, disciplinarian upbringing provided by his widowed mother and the influence of his Christian background in developing a sense of moderation and responsibility.

Following a spate of violence in Mosside which led to the deaths of several young people, Geoff Thompson, adopting the rôle of the tough businessman rather than the top-class sportsman, developed schemes which encouraged young people to gain an interest in sport and offered them the chances to succeed and

develop in ways which were beneficial to society and fulfilling for them. He gained the support of sports men and women, approached statutory bodies such as the Sports Council, spoke to business people, teachers, voluntary groups, parents and young people themselves, all with the aim of conveying the philosophy that sport should be an opportunity, a vehicle for young people to develop in life.

**Many young people live in a state of social anarchy, are undisciplined, and lack direction and purpose**

It soon became clear to the YCS and its founders that something needed to be done for Britain's youth. Many young people lived in a state of social anarchy, were undisciplined and lacked direction and purpose in their lives.

The YCS set itself the task of re-igniting young people's enthusiasm. It came to Mosside to discover out what was being done for them in the inner city areas and to develop partnerships with local agencies. What Geoff Thompson saw was not encouraging. So many agencies existed which claimed to want to help young people, but they worked in a fragmented and unstructured way and were often in open competition for resources and funding. For the last three years the YCS has been trying to redress this problem and to develop a means by which groups can work effectively and in harmony. The YCS, with its philosophy based on olympianism, acts as a magnet and has succeeded in attracting inward investment of over a million pounds, funding that would not otherwise have been available. Slowly, a process of social regeneration is changing the urban face of Mosside and the potential of its young people is being realised by the use of sound marketing techniques and the vision and enthusiasm to make things happen.

The British public today is particularly concerned with rising crime levels and it has recently been estimated that youth crime costs the taxpayer four billion pounds a year in bureaucracy alone. The YCS calculated that this could be reduced if a third of the money were to be channelled into quantifiable projects developed by all agencies involved with young people. Similarly, when the competing is over for many young athletes, either through injury or retirement, that energy still needs to be channelled into initiatives which take and keep them off the streets and encourage them to participate in worthwhile sporting, cultural and artistic activities.

The main attractions of the YCS for youth agencies are its strong links with the sporting community and the scroll to which many top sports men and women are signatories. Now in its fourth year, a structure has been built which can be replicated throughout the country and used as a blueprint for other initiatives which allow young people to develop in life, through sport and through winning. Geoff Thompson compares the YCS to a train which relies upon the resources of the business community to keep its engine running. It keeps on going because it is able to reach performance indicators set by the community.

The speaker concluded by stressing the simplicity of his message. He listens to the 'customer', as any good businessman should, and learns from his failures and the experiences of those youngsters he has lost to crime. He values young people and is thus prepared to take a collective approach to serving their needs and showing them, by the efforts and enthusiasm of his colleagues in the sporting world, that there are people who care about their future.

For discussion, the speaker was joined by three young representatives from the YCS — **Marcus Adam**, **Byron Callame** and **Adesuwa McCalle**.

➤ Discussion focused on clarifying the work and aims of the Youth Charter for Sport and the approaches it takes in serving young people.

Some questioned the impact of such initiatives. Is sport merely a ready 'solution' to the problems of black youth and is the YCS, with its emphasis on physical rather than academic achievement, re-inforcing racial stereotypes and even impeding black promising youngsters from pursuing an academic career? The panel countered this argument with the view that, although young black people are in many ways more disadvantaged than their white counterparts, it would be a misrepresentation to suggest that they are not able to make conscious post-sixteen choices about their future orientations.

The merits of sport in developing lifelong values and a positive attitude to life were emphasised. Was the YCS attaching too much importance to sport when it is clear that most youngsters probably lack the physical ability and mental stamina to compete, let alone win? The YCS insists that helping young people to win in life is its main purpose, a process by which lifetime bests are rewarded and personal skills and self-esteem developed.

On a more pessimistic note, it was suggested that, in spite of the success of organisations like the YCS, such initiatives are merely 'plugging' the gaps created by deficiencies in the fabric of society and can never be a substitute for a job, a solid education and a decent family background. The YCS takes the view that through collective will and collaborative effort — no agency can possibly work alone in tackling these issues — such deficiencies may be overcome.

**SPEAKERS**

**Sir Roger Bannister CBE**, Trustee of St Catharines

**Peter Blake**, Headmaster, Windsor Boys' School

**Derek Casey**, Chief Executive, The Sports Council

**Kenneth Fox**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Exercise and Sport Science, University of Exeter

**Sally Hart**, Director, Central Policy Unit, The Sports Council

**Nigel Haynes**, Director, Fairbridge

**Elizabeth Henderson**, Headteacher, Eton-Porny First School, Eton

**Sue Lyons**, Former HMI Schools

**Caroline Millington**, Controller of Production, BBC Network Radio

**Elizabeth Murdoch**, Head, Chelsea School of Physical Education, Sports Science, Dance and Leisure, University of Brighton

**Geoff Thompson**, Executive Chairman, Youth Charter for Sport

**Dick Whitfield**, Chief Probation Officer, Kent Probation Service

## 3 Helping Young People at Risk

The two speakers for this session both work with young people at risk, but adopt different approaches to dealing with their needs.

**Many youngsters have no concept of a strong work ethic, self-esteem and educational achievement**

**Nigel Haynes**, as Director of the charity Fairbridge, tries to take a realistic view about the pressures young people are under today and this is reflected in the kind of support his organisation provides. He explained that so many youngsters have no concept of the meaning of a

strong work ethic, self-esteem and educational achievement and have not been raised in an environment where such values and attitudes are taken for granted. Consequently, in a society where, for many, the alternative to crime is stacking supermarket shelves, the appeal of easy money through crime and the buzz of street life are seen as positive options.

The speaker argued that behaviour and attitudes will only change from a commitment on behalf of a young person who has recognised the need for change. Furthermore, any policy which sees prison as no more than a temporary removal from the opportunity to offend will fail to address the heart of the issue of juvenile crime and, in the long-term, the safety of this community. At the same time, any programme offered as an alternative to custody should not simply divert the young people from criminal activities since they will fail to understand how crime affects their social environment and the community, nor will they have learnt how to control anti-social behaviour. This is an important distinction since the desire, or motivation, to take or create the opportunity to offend may have been simply suppressed and not addressed.

The personal education training provided by organisations like Fairbridge is about educating a young person through a range of activities and experiences to a stage where they recognise a turning point in their lives and want to do something positive about it. More significantly, it is also a point where someone else also sees it and actively supports and develops that commitment in a positive and mutually agreed way. Furthermore, being accountable, and also responsible, are fundamental traits to being valued in society. Accountability means acceptance of community needs, a recognition of right and wrong, and a belief that other people matter.

**Many of the young people Fairbridge works with have little grasp of the simplest life skills and desperately need recognition of their own worth**

The development training offered by Fairbridge is part of this process. It confronts offending behaviour using a range of activities, placements and work, some outdoors in wild and remote places that are challenging and fun, yet at the same time review behaviour and build confidence. Such activities also help build trust. Many of the young people Fairbridge works with have little grasp of the most simple life-skills and desperately need recognition of their own worth. Consequently, the schemes do not conclude with a return to the reality of everyday life from the outdoors and all the positive emotions created by that experience, but an individual plan is developed for each participant which continues to offer opportunity and support after the course ends. This continues for as long as is necessary to enable the young person to gain control of their life, cease offending and return to a normal pattern of development. The key is long-term support.

**To be successful programmes should offer hope, legal fun, a natural high and, perhaps most importantly, long term support and care**

There is no one single project for young people at risk which contains the whole answer and organisations like Fairbridge provide only part of the support they need. To be successful, programmes should offer hope, legal fun, a natural high, but perhaps, most importantly of all, long-term support and care. As the course supervision ends, the participants need proof that you can be in charge of your own life, responsible for themselves and in turn take responsibility for others by being part of a team and enjoying it.

**Dick Whitfield** used his presentation to explore the 'business' link between organisations like Fairbridge and the Probation Service and how such partnerships assist him in dealing with persistent young offenders.

The figures for re-offending among juveniles are disturbingly high and a solution may require drastic measures. This was why Kent Probation Service was prepared to invest £40,000 of its hard-pressed budget in supporting the work of Fairbridge and last year sent 233 young offenders on Fairbridge outdoor courses. This mixture of outdoor activities and personal development has proved to be a worthwhile investment in that it has led to some impressive results.

The speaker focused on three specific areas: why it is important to use sport and outdoor activities and interests with young offenders; how the Service arrived at the system it currently operates; and what are the real results of this investment in time, energy and resources.

The statistics illustrate the seriousness of youth offending in the UK today. A British Crime Survey revealed that 10–17 year olds commit 7 million offences annually at a cost to the taxpayer around £1 billion per year, most of it on funding police work. Out of the 200,000 known young offenders reported last year, about 30 per cent will probably become repeat offenders.

The origins of the current system for dealing with these people lie in an understanding of what leads them to offend. Long-term truancy — many have not been at school since the age of 14 — has resulted in poor educational achievement and consequently little or no chance of employment. They have few social or personal skills and self-esteem and self-image are both at a low ebb. Add to this the boredom, hopelessness, frustration and often family and housing problems and one ends up with an individual whose problems appear insurmountable.

Supervising these people is a hard, dogged and patient business and there is no single solution to it. Therefore, in addition to the one-to-one supervision with a probation officer, Kent Probation Service has adopted a three-pronged strategy for dealing with every new young offender coming under its care.

The first is educational help and involves a mixture of individual tutors and courses at college and night school.

The second assists young offenders to improve their chances in the workplace. Despite what the politicians may say, there is a clear link between unemployment and crime, supported by both common sense and an enormous body of evidence. Indeed, experience has shown that anybody who comes onto a probation order and is unemployed, is three times more likely to re-offend as somebody who has a job.

The third strategy engages young people in leisure activities, getting them to use their often enormous amount of spare time as constructively, creatively and enjoyably as possible.

Fairbridge is one of the main providers of such activities and offenders are sent on an initial day-taster course before progressing onto more ambitious programmes. Also, young offenders in the Kent region are referred to designated local sports clubs which are encouraged to take an active and long-term interest in the young person's welfare and development.

And the results? Like any other public sector organisation, Kent Probation Service must be able to match inputs with outcomes. In support of his commitment to the work of Fairbridge and other such organisations, Dick Whitfield quoted from a five year re-conviction survey undertaken by his service which examines offending rates over time. Statistics gained from tracking offenders over a year long period demonstrated a re-offending rate of 80 per cent of all those who pass through custody. However, the rate of re-conviction for those on leisure activity schemes fell to 41 per cent.

In Dick Whitfield's view, such figures justify the investment the Service has made in collaborative partnerships with Fairbridge and other similar schemes. Society as a whole will benefit, both socially and financially, from the success of programmes which are seen to reduce crime among young people and offer them opportunities to lead law-abiding lives.

**Society will benefit from the success of programmes which are seen to reduce crime among young people and offer them opportunities to lead law-abiding lives**

The speaker echoed Nigel Haynes' comment that such programmes do not provide an instant panacea for dealing with young offenders. However, the evidence so far suggests that outdoor pursuits and sport do provide an extremely effective springboard to really productive work and for the Kent Probation Service are one of the most important elements of good community supervision.

Outdoor activities are essentially about putting into practice the philosophy that we must all learn to help ourselves and take responsibility for our own well-being. Programmes which engender such values and thus tap into the enormous, often misdirected, talents of young people make that philosophy possible.

**Outdoor activities are about putting into practice the philosophy that we must learn to help ourselves**

For discussion, the speakers were joined by two young people — **Paul Flintham** and **Lyndsay Hasan** — who had successfully completed Fairbridge programmes and now worked full-time for the organisation.

➤ Discussion focused around issues relating to how one deals with delinquent behaviour and, in particular, ways in which young people's family background and personal experiences influence their behaviour. Although many are often from single parent families or products of broken homes, there are usually a number of elements which combine and lead to crime and misdemeanour. For example, the fractured, short-termism of the job market has encouraged more family migration and less opportunity for people to settle into and become part of the community. Such factors have been compounded by the consequent loss of family and inter-generational support. Particularly disturbing is that patterns of delinquency have been most accurately diagnosed by pre-school nursery teachers suggesting the worth of a preventative approach to the problem of youth offending. Indeed, a US survey, conducted over 25 years and known as the 'Headstart' programme, undertook to work with 0–5 years olds as a solution to inner city ghetto violence and crime. The results have been impressive, both financially — for every dollar spent, seven was saved — and socially since those youngsters on the projects did better educationally, were more likely to get a job and less likely to get involved in crime. Unfortunately, such projects are long-term and those governments which initiate them are not going to gain the credit for their success. Pressure on public expenditure is such that any project which is not perceived to be politically and financially viable in the short-term is unlikely to gain approval. Therefore, most work with offenders is intervention-based and there are many cases where help extended to youngsters after they have got involved in crimes is too little too late to have any major impact on their behavioural patterns.

## 4 Health and Fitness

This session, chaired by **Sir Roger Bannister**, brought together two speakers with different perspectives on the utility of exercise. Kenneth Fox, an educationalist, explored the health benefits of activity to youngsters' mental and physical well-being. Derek Casey of the Sports Council spoke of the value of exercise for generating good levels of fitness, as well as encouraging healthy attitudes to sport and physical activity.

Exercise, argued **Kenneth Fox**, has traditionally been seen as a way of improving cardiovascular fitness and most attention has been paid to the kind of vigorous activity which raises heart rates. Recently, however, the focus has shifted towards a broader definition of physical activity and the range of health benefits that these bring. A stroll at lunchtime, for example, may be beneficial for reducing stress and increasing mental well-being. All weight-bearing movement will help develop and maintain bone and muscle condition and help prevent unhealthy weight gain.

The evidence substantiating a causal link between physical inactivity and ill-health and premature death is now strong. So much so, that medical professionals are beginning to view sedentary living as a primary risk factor that should be treated with equal vigour to high blood pressure or high blood fats. They warn that inactive people have twice the risk of ill-health than the active.

**There is strong evidence for a causal link between physical inactivity and ill health and premature death**

Since 1980, there has been a doubling in the number of people who are clinically obese. If present trends continue, by the year 2005 the health of one in four women and one in five men will be at serious risk because of their obesity. This dramatic rise has not been reflected in eating habits, since energy and fat intake have decreased, and is strongly associated with reductions in activity caused by affluence and technology. We walk less, rely on labour-saving devices, have less active jobs and enjoy more inactive leisure than previous generations. The result for many people is a steady weight gain over the years to unhealthy levels. The government has been concerned about these statistics and the Health of the Nation Task Force for Physical Activity has delivered guidelines to decrease the numbers of adults who are totally sedentary, encouraging more people to take up moderate activity, such as brisk walking, on a daily basis.

The same epidemiological evidence is not available for children because people generally do not suffer from diseases or die until they become middle-aged or older. However, there is some evidence to show that they are becoming fatter at an earlier age. There is also little doubt that a large percentage of children, particularly girls, are becoming less active as parents have become increasingly concerned about the dangers of traffic and their children's welfare. In the 20-year period up to 1990 there was a four-fold increase in numbers of children taken to school by car and the age at which children are allowed to go out on their own has increased by two or three years. At the same time, the availability and attractiveness of inactive pursuits such as all-day television and computer games has increased. The situation in schools has not helped as time dedicated to sport and physical education has declined to the point where the UK is now one of the worst countries in Europe, particularly at primary level.

Many authorities have looked towards physical fitness as the key to children's health. However, surprisingly, there is no evidence that youth fitness has declined. This is probably because in youngsters it is largely determined by genetic and maturational factors and is poorly related to either their physical activity or health. Awards or grades offered through scores on fitness tests are therefore unfair as children vary tremendously in maturational stage and ability. If we are to help

ensure our children's health, we need to concentrate on getting them moving more, on a daily basis. This could be done by developing an environment that is more conducive to walking, cycling and more informal opportunities for play. This will help them develop healthy bones, muscles and prevent increases in fatness. In addition, for heart health, they need the more vigorous activity that might be achieved through sport or some of the more active forms of play or exercise which involve increasing their heart rates.

Schools could clearly help. The structure of the school routine significantly influences children's activity levels as it takes up forty per cent of their waking time. Safer routes to school need to be developed to encourage more walking and cycling, and playgrounds need to be better equipped and designed for active games. Physical education should provide a range of active games and sports that are age-appropriate and appeal to youngsters of all physical abilities. A programme restricted to highly competitive sports has already proved to be counterproductive for the majority of youngsters. A greater range of extra-curricular recreational opportunities for activities and games is also required.

More important, physical education should be used to attract youngsters to physical activity, and educate them in the need to develop healthy activity and eating habits, and ways to help them deal with their bodies as they grow into adulthood. We cannot get away from the fact that the long-term health benefits of physical activity can only be achieved if activity becomes a lifetime habit.

In **Derek Casey**'s view, sport and physical activity are probably the most significant vehicles for improving the physical and mental health of young people. This has been recognised by organisations like the Sports Council and has led to government policy initiatives and increased expenditure.

**Sport and physical activity are probably the most significant vehicles for improving the physical and mental health of young people**

The speaker recalled his own positive experiences of school sports and acknowledged how lucky he was to have been surrounded and influenced by so many positive rôle models in his early years. Yet so many youngsters did not have these kinds of opportunities. For example, in the Glasgow inner city where he worked, young people grew up in an environment where gang warfare, poor diet, low standards of education and poor housing were prevalent and, in some cases, these influences shaped the values they later formed.

In contrast to many other countries, in the UK we are now fortunate in having a solid base of community facilities, with high levels of interest in sport among the population. Furthermore, we have excellent professional management of facilities and a huge and committed army of volunteers in sport. This requires the involvement of a large number of organisations, although a greater level of co-operation would be desirable.

When we examine how sport is viewed in other cultures it appears that the UK has struck a fair balance. It avoids both the elitism of the former Eastern Bloc countries and the virtual cessation of mass involvement in sport which occurs in the USA after young people leave the college environment. Although it is important to build upon the successes of unique performers, we need also to be laying the foundation of sport among young people for their personal development at recreational as well as competitive level. To achieve this, good community facilities and working partnerships between the various organisations involved in the process are essential.

Through the National Lottery, the Sports Council is now able to realise some of these developments. The primary objective has been investment in buildings and infrastructure and over the last 12 months £50 million has been allocated by the Lottery Fund to construct new school facilities — pitches, gymnasia, sports halls and swimming pools which can also be used by the local community. Furthermore, a change to the rules means that schools now only have to find twenty per cent of the cost of these new approved buildings. About £120 million has also gone into developing local sports clubs for young people after they leave the school environment and a further £100 million has been invested in other major capital projects.

**Within the next five years the Sports Council would like to see every school and community with a range of sports facilities of the right standard, quality and accessibility**

Within the inner cities, 90 per cent of the costs of new facilities have been provided by the Sports Council and the same level of investment has also been offered in rural areas where access to good facilities has been more difficult. Within the next five to six years the Sports Council would like to see every school and every community provided with a range of sports facilities of the right standard, quality and accessibility.

Another crucial area of investment is in people and initiatives have been launched to improve coaching and leadership opportunities for talented sports men and women through university scholarships. General attitudes to physical activity in Britain are also a focus for investment and recent reports have addressed issues relating to diet, smoking and physical activity, some of which the Physical Activity Task Force has since followed through. By recommending moderate activity levels it is hoped that people leading sedentary lifestyles will be encouraged to take a more positive approach to health and physical fitness. The speaker even suggested that a 'Health of the Young Nation' campaign should be launched to undertake research into health issues among the younger population.

The fourth area of investment should be in young people themselves. There are high levels of interest in sport among young people and they have some very positive attitudes to the benefits of healthy lifestyles. However, those attitudes need to be translated into long-term commitment and programmes in schools such as 'Top Sport' and 'Top Club' go some way towards providing opportunities for all to participate in sport and complement the physical activity programme.

The belief underpinning these initiatives is to enable youngsters to progress from school to local authority provision by encouraging them to take part in sport at club level. More funds need to be channelled into providing support and information about locally-based facilities and also into coaching schemes for teachers and leaders of youth organisations.

These initiatives cannot be achieved without partnerships between the relevant organisations which are both sustainable and long-term. Young people should no longer have to rely upon the good fortune of growing up in an environment where such activities are encouraged and facilities exist to support them. They should all benefit equally from a planned and comprehensive approach which will assist their self-development and the stability of the community as a whole.

Over the next 5–6 years the Sports Council will have approximately £1.8 billion to spend on sport in its wider sense, embracing all levels of the community and issues affecting the health and fitness of young people. If we maintain and develop awareness of the need for new facilities, hold onto high levels of participation, address the needs of our most talented performers, and ensure that all organisations work

together, some positive outcomes should emerge and carry us forward.

➤ Discussion raised some of the problems which have encumbered the development of community-based projects and the difficulties educationists have encountered in engendering positive attitudes to health and activity.

When questioned about the rationale behind investment in facilities and buildings, Derek Casey announced the introduction of a two-pronged strategy: funding for top-level athletes with provision for coaching at local level. The latter initiative will bring schools and communities together and lottery money will be used to provide funding for viable, long-term projects. Responding to criticism that British sport has never done as well as it did internationally during the 1960s, it was pointed out that at this time the authorities had only just become aware of the utility of community investment in sport — many inner-city pitches and grounds had dated back to the 1920s. Sport in the 1960s had fallen into two extremes: international success at a narrow range of sports and PE lessons in school — there was virtually nothing in the way of community club sports and activities. By contrast, schools can now draw upon facilities provided by clubs and local authorities and thus offer a wider range of sporting opportunities.

Some concern was expressed about the implications of encouraging schools to function as leisure centres in the evenings. Many lack sufficient resources for fixed costs and support services such as reception facilities for visitors. Unfortunately, lottery money cannot be used to fund on-going maintenance costs once projects have been set up because of the continuing drain that this would have upon lottery resources. In any case, this kind of investment was always designed to finance capital projects and the on-going viability of the scheme depended upon its ability to meet maintenance costs by revenue generated. Nonetheless, with 80 per cent of schools open in the evenings and 90 per cent of them during the holidays the initiative has been successful .

All recognised that there is still much to be done. For example, the success of community coaching initiatives depends largely upon the enthusiasm of the Governing Bodies of Sport (GBS) to run them and the availability of expertise at local level. Similarly, too much emphasis on sport should be avoided since it excludes unco-ordinated youngsters from participating in activity. An individual approach to their physical education needs should be adopted and this is not always found in traditional school sports. The decline of PE in the National Curriculum needs to be reversed if we are to demonstrate the depth of our concern for the health of our young people, although it is encouraging that over the past five years the message for activity, and not just sport, has been increasingly heard.

## 5 The Media: Shaping the Future

In addressing the main theme of the presentation, **Caroline Millington** warned that she had no powers of prediction and stressed that no sensible person would attempt to forecast what is likely to happen in the world of information and the media. However, some attempts at envisaging the response of young people to the media and technological developments within the next few years is essential.

The speaker had recently moved to a new post within the BBC and an important part of her remit is to work out how the Corporation should be approaching the multi-media explosion and the arrival of digital technology.

The task began with a profile of today's teenager. He/she has access to satellite and cable, owns a CD player and probably also has, or uses, a personal computer which gives access to the Internet and perhaps a CD ROM. The teenager will be looking forward to interactive television and the opportunity of tuning into hundreds more digital channels and will also be anticipating making long-distance telephone calls through the Internet (at the cost of a local call).

This profile indicates how starkly young people's attitudes to the media have changed in the space of twenty years. Today 99% of households have a television, 91% have a 'phone and 77% a video recorder. Perhaps a third have a personal computer and the same number are likely to have a television in their bedroom.

**It isn't the young who are the biggest couch potatoes but those aged 55 years and over**

Does this mean that television is the biggest danger and the main instigator of the 'couch potato' phenomenon? In actual fact, it isn't the young who are the biggest couch potatoes but those aged 55 years and over. The average weekly television viewing in the 4–15 age group has actually fallen by a couple of hours in the last decade, although this may be partly explained by an increase in the use of videos and video games.

Young people take part in more out-of-home activities than any other age group, both for sport and entertainment. The current 15–24 age group is the first to grow up in a media and information-saturated environment and is at ease with technology, although at present the majority do *not* have access to multi-media facilities. On the other hand, 88 per cent of children believe the Internet is one of the most exciting things to happen this decade and three quarters of them believe it will live up to this expectation. Furthermore, research suggests that children who have used computers from infancy will have effortless advantages over their elders in processing information when they reach the job market.

The real challenge in this volatile world is how information and entertainment providers can retain the interest and loyalty of young people. A good way of approaching this question might be to explore what young people themselves say about their predominant interests.

Research conducted recently for Radio 1 across Europe revealed that music pervades the lives of young people. Up to 73 per cent declared it to be a 'passion', of which two thirds favoured dance music. Their leisure time is dominated by drinking, clubbing, drugs and sport. Their top five concerns are Aids, crime, racism, drugs and rape. These elements go into making what is termed 'youth culture'.

What does it tell us? Whilst children watch television, young people — the 14–24 year old age group — are more likely to listen to their favourite music on the radio. However, many of the rôle models and cultural icons of those who listen to Radio 1 first become familiar to them through exposure on television. Many of these are likely to be successful sports people — as the success of the late-night BBC television programme 'They Think It's All Over?' has demonstrated. Broadcast well after the 9 pm watershed, it apparently gives sport 'attitude' and shows that those who are successful in sports are also 'real' people to whom youth can relate. Sport has become fashionable.

The media recognises that sport is now big business. The BBC has particular reason to rue this as BSky B and ITV increasingly out-bid them for major sporting contracts. Sport clearly sells satellite dishes. It was recently estimated that the annual total sports market in the UK is worth about £9 billion pounds, a figure which includes sporting rights, tickets at events and sports equipment. The youth market is worth another £1.5 billion. Therefore, it would seem to be in the interests of Nike and other big business participants to keep up-to-date with the interests, concerns and activities of young people.

Research also indicates that pubs and alcohol are becoming less important with

the 15-24 age-group. Instead, almost 90 per cent of this group regularly participate in some kind of sport such as swimming, keep-fit, soccer, and walking. In addition, young men are much keener than young women to be seen as active, sporty, witty, entertaining and street-wise.

Faced with this data, what is the media's responsibility towards young people? Is it really shaping their future?

**While serving a younger audience, media must not at the same time alienate the rest of society**

Clearly, a balancing act has to be maintained. While serving a younger audience, media like the BBC must not at the same time alienate the rest of society. This may be impossible without offending the adult sense of what young people ought to want to do, to see and to hear. Since the Internet has an anarchy and lack of regulation which appeals to young people, the BBC, like all other media bodies, is working hard to get a presence on the Internet so it can connect with its young users. It is currently concentrating on humour and sport as the two subject areas most likely to make that connection work and the backing of such rôle models as Gary Lineker and Frank Bruno are an important part of this process. Their mixture of sporting prowess and media exposure has made them acceptable rôle models and they help get the message across that sport is 'good news'.

For big business, young people are the spenders of today and tomorrow and there will always be something new and expensive to attract them. The way in which media companies are pushing up the costs of sports rights in the battle to stage the key events is an indication of the growing marketability of sport. The sports themselves have consequently acquired new income and gained a new profile, thus attracting more spectators and creating new superstars recognised both inside and outside the sporting world.

When it comes to shaping the future, the speaker believes that it is either big business or the media which will have the last word. For example, media studies has now become the most fashionable university degree course and young people are now taking control of broadcasting, print and on-line. The most creative thinking for the digital age comes from young minds. Clearly, young people know how to control the media.

Therefore, if we want to know the shape of the future we must ask the young people themselves and in a language which is accessible and unpatronsing. The sports celebrities who communicate in this way show that the life-style they have adopted is fun and unfussy. Their message is clear: 'it's cool to like sport, it's hip to be active.'

The media exposure of sporting celebrities encourages more young people to follow active lifestyles. Big business makes the whole thing possible as investment in sporting events brings substantial dividends — creating a 'virtuous circle' beneficial to both sides. In the speaker's opinion, this presents a positive and optimistic picture and she concluded by questioning the concern our society appears to nurse about the 'inactivity' of young people today.

**The media exposure of sporting celebrities encourages more young people to follow active lifestyles**

➤ Much of the discussion which followed challenged the speaker's optimism and suggested that the media coverage of sport sent out misleading and possibly dangerous messages.

It was felt that many good 'minority' sports were not getting sufficient coverage on terrestrial channels. In fact, in order to find out about and watch some of these less popular sports, one has to tune into satellite television where coverage is extensive and, in many cases, quite innovative. Unfortunately, since football is by far the most watched and followed sport in the UK, it is always going to be the predominant focus of TV sports coverage. Furthermore, few broadcasters are prepared to film sports where levels of spectating are low and this means that they do not get sufficient national coverage which may encourage young people to take them up.

Similarly, the media was blamed for 'creating' celebrities who provided dubious rôle models for young people and it was suggested that it could exercise more responsibility in its influence over youth behaviour. While the speaker admitted that the power of the media is considerable in certain areas, she questioned how far it *does* actually shape and form the values of the young. The media is a tool of society and reflects rather than forms prevailing attitudes. Furthermore, as a society we often fail to appreciate the growing sophistication of young people who have grown up in the media age and are quite capable of seeing through the underlying 'messages' of the most brilliant and manipulative advertising techniques. This is why a return to the format of the 'public information announcements' as a vehicle for encouraging active and healthy lifestyles would be self-defeating. Evidence suggests that conveying information through educating rather than entertaining is far less likely to succeed.

## 6 Schools: What Could Be

Each of the three speakers — two of them school heads, the other a former HMI of Schools — related their experiences of trying to satisfy guidelines laid down by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) on the amount of time which should be spent on sport and physical activity in schools.

**Elizabeth Henderson**, a primary head, explored how primary schools cater to the physical needs of youngsters. She quoted from a 1991 publication *PE for All Ages*, which provides a definition of the function of sport in schools for the benefit of school governors:

> *Sport covers a range of physical activities in which adults and young people may participate. Physical education, on the other hand, is a process of learning, the context may be mainly physical, the focus however is on the child and his or her development in physical competence, rather than on the actual activity.*

Although she praised the content of the document, the speaker was dismayed by the absence of a single photograph on anything other than competitive games and questioned the message this omission might convey to staff and governors.

**Learning is about developing the whole person**

She also expressed concerns about the current use of benchmarking to determine children's levels of progress. In her view, learning is about developing the whole person. Furthermore, primary schools are to be inspected on sport from September 1997 and are busy providing sports facilities and opportunities for all pupils, even though sport is not necessarily a good developmental process for all children.

The main impediment to implementing this ruling is that, in most primary schools, there are no free periods and consequently little time to carry out the personal and social education which should follow physical activity sessions. Indeed, current demands upon the time of primary school teachers have become quite impossible.

Many primary school teachers believe that in the early years of a child's life it is impossible to segregate one subject from another. Indeed, the reason that pre-school teachers are best able to recognise potential delinquents is that they are able

to focus on the development of the 'whole child' before the introduction of specialist subject teaching at junior school.

On the other hand, a possible benefit of physical education in schools is to help redress the current decline in the ability of children to take part in inter-active language exercises. They come to school unable to explain things, they lack basic general knowledge and are unable to argue, take turns in conversation, or even listen. It is an area for which increasingly more time is being devoted at primary school level to the detriment of other subjects. Part of the learning process in PE is the talk about winning and losing, how one interprets and follows the rules, how children play together and care for equipment and accept the ruling of the umpire on decisions. It is the talking and inter-action which educates as much as the activity itself.

The speaker drew a distinction between the purpose of physical education in schools and the way traditional school games have created a competitive environment not always suitable to the child's development. For example, children should be taught sports and ball skills slowly, perhaps in small groups where they can win or lose without pressure from peer groups and parents to succeed. Winners of school reading and writing competitions are not awarded the accolades which greet winners on school sports days, nor do sporting losers suffer the kind of derision which greets those who cannot string two adjectives together. Why then do we do this in sporting situations and what is the effect of such behaviour on children's self-esteem?

Clearly, the Ofsted percentage charts are creating immense difficulties for teachers in seeking to quantify the learning process. The burdens of the school timetable make it difficult to devote time to the development of the whole child and the pressures upon teachers to drive children through the day to satisfy guidelines are becoming quite frightening.

Summarising the attitudes youngsters adopt towards physical activity in the course of their school career, former HMI **Sue Lyons** revealed how dramatically things change as children progress through the system.

At Key Stage 1 (5–7 year olds) children have far more interest in play and activity than in structured work and most schools ensure that children are given a small amount of physical education daily. However, by Key Stage 2 (7–11 years) interest in physical education declines quite dramatically, caused mainly by an increase in compulsory subjects within the National Curriculum. A further problem is that teachers themselves are not experienced enough and lack the expertise to develop children at that age, particularly now there is so much emphasis on knowledge and testing.

At Key Stage 3 (11–14 year olds), motivation to engage in physical activity is revived although by Key Stage 4 (14–16 year olds) the pattern begins to diverge. Those taking examinations in PE demonstrate a genuine interest and achievement levels are high and standards rise. However, for the remaining 14-16 year olds who do not continue along that route, PE is resented as an imposed activity and it is therefore doubtful whether they really learn anything by the experience.

If this had been mathematics or English, there would be a great deal of concern expressed about standards. Unfortunately, PE for the 14–16 age-group has traditionally used teachers with the least amount of expertise. Non-specialists are placed with this age group because it is a recreation programme and progress is not the main function, unless the pupils go for a GCSE qualification.

In general Ofsted's remit is to inspect only what happens during lessons, not between them, although from 1996 they began to include extra-curricular activities in some school inspections. Understandably, this has provoked opposition since teachers are not paid to perform voluntary activities. Unfortunately, until some inspection of extra-curricular PE takes place, its success and effectiveness will never be fully measured.

The National Curriculum assumes that, if you rank eleven subjects they will all be afforded equal time and commitment and that the subject which comes in last will be given equal attention to the one that comes in first. In fact, there is neither time nor sufficient resources to devote to PE in equal terms with other subjects.

**There is growing manipulation of figures to 'prove' that standards are declining**

Another problem is the growing use and manipulation of figures to 'prove' that standards are declining. How can this be so when examination results have actually improved? And by what criteria are these standards being measured?

It is clear that the National Curriculum will have to be reviewed and revised if PE is to be taken seriously in schools. It is not only the responsibility of PE teachers, but that of all adults, and they should be exploring ways of finding time to do physical activity, either before and after school or between lessons and at break-times. Unfortunately, 8 out of 10 teachers did not enjoy physical activity at school.

Related to this is the need to develop expertise in primary school teaching. On the other hand, asking teachers to be experts in eleven different subjects is already placing a huge burden on their time and inhibits their ability to assimilate each subject with sufficient depth and understanding.

**We need to re-explore current definitions of 'activity' — what about the activity in corridors and playgrounds and between lessons?**

Also, we need to re-explore current definitions of 'activity'. What about the activity which goes on outside PE, in the corridors, in playgrounds and between lessons? Perhaps we should take the view that physical education is different at different stages. When it is used as a vehicle for children's development and movement, it is very successful. However, in sport it has a tendency to exclude more people than it includes. We need to encourage young people to be good at sport for other reasons and not push them into taking up games when it is clear that they do not have an aptitude for them. *Raising the Game* is about creating top-class sports men and women, whereas the majority of young people regard activity in quite different ways.

In short, we need to be more open-minded about how we approach issues of health, fitness and lifestyles. We might explore ways of educating people about diet and the consumption of processed foods which causes us more ill-health than a lack of activity. We could recognise the cultural and ethnic diversity in our schools and learn from some of the Eastern traditions that have proven to be more beneficial. For example, we don't see yoga or martial arts on our curriculum, even though such pursuits are increasingly popular among the adult population.

**Peter Blake**, a secondary school head, began his presentation with reference to a 1996 report from the Department for the National Heritage which he believes provides the backdrop to many of the conference discussions — *Raising the Game*. This initiative formed part of a wider campaign, supported by the Prime Minister John Major, to re-establish the centrality of physical education and sport within the National Curriculum. As the Prime Minister explained:

> *My ambition is . . . to re-establish sport as one of the great pillars of education alongside the academic, the vocational and the moral*

Few would dispute that these four pillars constitute the basis of a good education for pupils in British schools today because a broadly balanced curriculum and an

## DISCUSSION GROUPS

The discussion groups focused on two specific areas. Firstly, the underlying issues affecting the health and fitness of young people and attempts to improve it. Secondly, to devise a set of recommendations which could be used as the basis of a future strategy for change.

**A: The Main Issues**

- A healthy lifestyle is a 'holistic' concept to which there should be three main components: *physical* (stamina, speed, endurance, co-ordination), *mental* (intellectual, emotional, spiritual), and *social* (communication, interaction with others, a place within the community and society as a whole).
- Educators need to engender a passion for learning in physical education and therefore sport and exercise should be portrayed as 'fun'.
- The cost implications for training teachers and coaches and the time-scale involved in such a strategy both locally and at educational level must be settled.
- The potentially insidious influence of the media needs to be challenged and a fair balance struck in the coverage of sport and other issues affecting the health and welfare of young people.
- A coherent and sustainable strategy to improve the health of young people should be devised and launched.

**B: Principal Recommendations**

- Schools and youthwork curricula should lay greater emphasis upon physical and health education and sufficient time should be set aside for these activities.
- Increase the provision of INSET days to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills — resources should be forthcoming to provide suitable cover.
- Businesses need better tax incentives to support young people in their sporting activities.
- Mount a campaign to encourage all young people to engage in some physical activity and movement every day.
- Encourage a 'fun' approach to activity among young people, possibly through better links with youth clubs and other extra-curricula initiatives.
- A multi-agency approach which encourages the sharing of resources and facilities at local and national levels.
- A multi-organisation strategy which involves key agencies from the corporate sector, the leisure industry and the media.
- Resources should be forthcoming to those programmes which are effective in community partnership.
- Any campaign needs to be *youth-focused*. This may entail the creation of a Council for Youth, a forum through which the views of young people could be expressed and also a central network for the collation and dissemination of information at all levels — possibly via a 'youth' website accessible to all clubs and organisations.
- Explore further the correlation between physical activity programmes and a reduction in youth crime with the aim of investing more if a link can be fully demonstrated.
- Establish a series of task forces to address nutrition, physical activity and other potential areas of health risk.
- Launch a Health of the Young Nation campaign, using this conference report as a possible springboard for action.

active school life will enable pupils to develop and grow.

**School is as much about social, sporting, cultural and moral development as academic and vocational**

School is as much about social, sporting, cultural and moral development as academic and vocational and what goes on in the classrooms and the gymnasia will have a significant impact upon future careers and quality of life.

However, trying to include two hours of sport per week within an already overburdened National Curriculum has not been feasible for many schools. At this stage 14–16 year olds are preoccupied with academic results, numeracy, literacy and IT skills. Furthermore, time must be found to teach such subjects as religious, health, sex, and personal and social education.

Obliged to cram so many different subjects into the teaching day, teachers are unable to accommodate extra sports lessons and this means eating ever further into extra-curricular time. While it is not unusual for sport and physical activity to take place after-school (in many cases it has always been so), the increased administrative burden imposed by changes in the National Curriculum prevent teachers from devoting sufficient time to these activities.

Increased levels of administration have resulted from the introduction of local management of schools. Paper work has accumulated, the time allotted to teachers for the completion of assessment reports has not increased and the number of after-school meetings is far greater than it ever used to be. While many are in support of initiatives like attainment targets, there are insufficient resources to ensure that they are properly implemented and excessive paper work prevents teachers from getting fully involved with the pupils and the classroom learning process.

The speaker agrees that there has been a decline in the amount of curricular and extra-curricular time spent on physical activities and sport, but argues that is understandable. How is the Government addressing this imbalance?

It is to be welcomed that Ofsted is now taking sport as an option seriously in its inspection procedure. Unfortunately, inspections often fail to take account of what goes on before and after school where much of the school activity occurs and there is also a tendency to be punitive in reports rather than acknowledging and recognising the overall work teachers do, both inside and outside the classroom.

Another recent initiative is the special awards given for school achievement in sport — 'Sportsmark' and 'Sportsgold'. Some suspect that they are little more than a stamp of approval, rather like the awards 'Investors in People' granted to people-friendly businesses, and doubt that they really constitute an incentive to concentrate on high levels of achievement in school sports.

And what about teacher training in physical education? Colleges are producing far too few people with physical educational qualifications and in order to fill these resulting gaps, schools often have to adopt a policy of appointing teachers for their sporting abilities as much as for their academic qualifications.

However, the enhanced rôle of the Sports Council in education and the new money generated by the Lottery are having a positive effect on sport development in schools. For example, the multi-agency Young People in Sport Task Force

comprising youth organisations, schools, and the national governing bodies of sport has been set up to organise and co-ordinate a national junior sports programme. Similarly, a coherent programme for the 4–18 age group run jointly by the Sports Council and the Youth Sports Trust links schools, clubs and the community and has led to initiatives like Top Play, Top Sport, Top Club and Champion Coaching.

**Linking schools to clubs within the community has proved to be a successful way of attracting funding for sporting facilities**

This linking of schools to clubs within the community has proved to be a successful way of attracting funding for sports facilities. Furthermore, it means that young people leaving school will have ready access to sports clubs in their area and be able to continue leading active lives.

Peter Blake concluded with an appeal to the DfEE and DNH to make it clear that the Prime Minister's interest in raising the profile of physical education in schools is shared by all government departments. Such support should also be accompanied by appropriate resources.

➤ Much of the discussion focused on the problems of the National Curriculum and ways in which the changes introduced under the 1988 Education Act have had a negative impact upon the provision of physical education in schools.

Before the 1988 Act, PE and religious education had been the only compulsory subjects schools were expected to teach pupils, although few schools would have been foolish enough not to offer mathematics and English as options. Now that so many other subjects have become compulsory, the status of physical education has diminished considerably and this has been exacerbated by the growing emphasis upon academic achievement as the sole criterion for choice of schools. League tables and performance indicators have increased the administrative burden upon teachers, depriving them of sufficient time to devote to the emotional and physical development of children. It was felt that neglecting these two aspects of a child's development was damaging and actually inhibited many of the brightest youngsters from fulfilling their intellectual potential. Indeed, those groups caring for young people at risk were of the opinion that some of Britain's most damaged youngsters are also some of our brightest.

The solution for many schools where headteachers and their colleagues believe in the educational value of getting all children involved in physical activity — whether of a competitive nature or simply for pleasure — is to exploit Lottery funding, particularly since the terms are now so generous.

There was also criticism of the decline in the use of outdoor activity centres by schools in recent years. Although partly a question of funding, the decline has been attributed to schools' inability to 'measure' every activity they offer. The value of outdoor pursuits, though acknowledged by many within the teaching profession, is difficult to quantify in percentage terms and thus hard to justify financially. The closure of many centres is unfortunate since such activities are enjoyable and often give young people their only opportunity to experience the tranquillity and beauty of rural life.

## 7 Moving On

In her overview of the conference, **Sally Hart** drew up a list of the main issues which she felt had emerged from discussions in the formal sessions and groups.

Several important questions had been repeatedly raised by speakers and participants. Particular importance was attached to the centrality of the young people themselves and the need for a solid family background, a network of friends and support, and positive rôle models to influence their life style choices. These rôle models could be teachers, parents, peer groups or sporting heroes.

**Young people need access to opportunities which offer positive and worthwhile experiences**

Similarly, young people need access to opportunities which offer positive and worthwhile experiences. This could be through community and leisure services, outdoor pursuit centres and the work of non-governmental agencies and organisations. There is a clear rôle for employers to provide a framework for people's working lives which will affect how they spend their time and the kinds of activities they engage in. For some youngsters, the opportunity to leave their own environment and experience other lifestyles and cultures can be both positive and enriching.

Much was said about the need for greater consensus in the way we approach the needs of young people and the value of working in partnership with other groups and agencies. Within the education world, mounting pressure over performance indicators and conflicting resource priorities means that teachers could be insufficiently trained or encouraged to provide appropriate support and work with other agencies. There was more consensus concerning the need to concentrate on the mental as well as physical dimensions of health and fitness, and tackling social problems such as youth crime, declining employment opportunities, homelessness and the growing vulnerability of certain groups in society were seen as an integral part of any strategy aimed at improving the well-being of young people.

**For some youngsters, the opportunity to experience other lifestyles and cultures can be positive and enriching**

One area often neglected is the early physical growth of young children and the critical importance of teaching such skills as good movement and ball play for proper physical development in later life. Also, social inter-action through sport, games and activity should be an integral part of the educative process and pursued at all ages and through all levels of school curriculum.

The speaker concluded by outlining the three main areas — physical, mental and social development — which could provide the basis for a strategy to follow forward from the conference. Four targets for each area were selected from evidence noted by the speakers and it was suggested that the format of the earlier Government initiative Health of the Nation Task Force might be applied, but with an exclusive focus on youth:

***Health of the Young Nation Task Force***

***Physical***

- Increase the amount of daily activity young people take
- Provide access to opportunities to take up physical activity
- Ensure a good range and balance of activities
- Ensure sustainable pathways of opportunity

***Mental***

- Invest in sustainable networks of motivators
- Stimulate self-esteem and critical judgement
- Reduce substance abuse
- Encourage acceptance of personal responsibility

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***Social***

- Reduce crime re-conviction rates
- Reduce homelessness
- Promote social inter-action
- Take measures to tackle unemployment

➤ Discussion raised a number of points which the participants felt the conference had tried to address and various suggestions were made concerning a possible strategy to carry forward from the conference discussions in order to highlight youth health and fitness.

Whilst it was acknowledged that institutions like the Sports Council had done much in recent years to raise the profile of physical activity through *Sport for All* and other initiatives, it was felt that the educative process still had some way to go towards promoting the virtues of a healthy lifestyle. Also, problems of access, affordability and attitudes to health in general still prevent the full participation of young people in physical activity and sport.

A number of suggestions were made for initiatives at local and national level:—

- The different rationale behind *Raising the Game* and *Sport for All* — sponsorship and development of elite sportsmen as opposed to the opportunity for everyone, irrespective of physical ability or levels of stamina, to lead an active life — should be clarified. This should not, however, prevent the development of a closer relationship between sport and physical education.
- Develop a better understanding of the value of physical activity in itself and reverse the trend towards competition-oriented sports and team games in schools. The Sports Council is promoting equal support for PE and sport and hopes to develop greater collaboration with physical education teachers in schools and colleges.
- We need to re-assess how sport is defined. The team games formula has been off-putting for many children and they take into adult life a negative impression of physical activity. Schools already offer up to 12 different sports annually and this could be expanded to include some of the more unusual pursuits such as orienteering.
- It is important to have successful home-grown sporting talent from which to draw inspiration, and pride in the victories of national teams has been shown to produce an interest in sports about which there had previously been little enthusiasm. The higher level of activity in sport is evidence of a wish to emulate our sporting rôle models and therefore to be active.
- A Health of the Young Nation Task Force should be created. The previous initiative — focusing on adults — developed strategies and structures for funding and research applications and provided a catalyst for a range of projects concerned with physical activity. Its research findings on the health needs of young people could be used to influence government policy on physical activity and health issues.
- The appointment of a Minister for Youth would be better than creating a Ministry for Youth which might encourage bureaucratic delay. The Minister would have cross-departmental responsibility and be answerable solely to the Prime Minister.
- The declining emphasis placed upon the teaching of physical education of pupils within the National Curriculum was felt to have dangerous implications for the health of the next generation of adults and should be challenged at local and national level.

## PARTICIPANTS

**Rob Achille**, Tennis Development Officer, Hammersmith and Fulham Safe Cities Project; **Marcus Adam**, Commonwealth Games athlete; **Sir Roger Bannister**, Trustee, St Catharine's; **Lady Bannister**; **Peter Blake**, Headmaster, Windsor Boys' School; **Stephen Caldecott**, Senior Lecturer in Sport Pedagogy, Liverpool Hope University College; **Byron Callame**, Teacher and trainer, Youth Charter for Sport; **Derek Casey**, Chief Executive, The Sports Council; **John Clegg JP**, Honorary Secretary, British Association of Sport and Medicine; **John Cook**, Principal, St Catharine's; **Vivien Cook**, St Catharine's; **Gilly Crump**, Executive Director, British Schools' Lawn Tennis Association; **Ray Davies**, Health and Fitness Development Officer, Birmingham City Council; **Christine Fiddes**, Senior Probation Officer, Northumbria Probation Service; **Paul Flintham**, volunteer instructor, Fairbridge; **Kenneth Fox**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Recreation and Exercise Science, Exeter University; **Lynda Fox**; **George Galliers-Pratt**, Sixth form pupil, Eton College; **Andrew Gardiner**, Managing Director, Acorn Venture; **Juliet Gosling**, Editor, Women in Sailing Network and freelance media consultant; **Claire Greenhalgh**, Conference Co-ordinator, St Catharine's; **Andy Halladay**, PE Teacher, Eton College; **Sally Hart**, Head, Central Policy Unit, Sports Council; **Lindsay Hassan**, trainee instructor, Fairbridge; **Nigel Haynes**, Director, Fairbridge; **Elizabeth Henderson**, Headteacher, Eton-Porny First School, Eton, Berkshire; **Noel Henderson**, Honorary Secretary, National Council for Schools' Sports; **Sarah Lloyd**, undergraduate, Health and Physical Recreation Studies, Liverpool Hope University College; **Ian Loveless**, Curriculum and Assessment Division, Department for Education and Employment; **Sue Lyons**, former HMI, Curriculum and Assessment Division and currently a Consultant in Physical Education; **Adesuwa McCalla**, Youth counsellor, Youth Charter for Sport; **Caroline Millington**, Controller of Programmes, BBC Network Radio; **Louise Mold**, Sixth form pupil, Windsor Girls' School; **Elizabeth Murdoch**, Head, Chelsea School of Physical Education, Sports Science, Dance and Leisure, University of Brighton; **Deborah Potts**, Deputy Programme Director, Central YMCA; **John Prideaux**, Sixth form pupil, Eton College; **Roger Putnam**, Director, Foundation for Outdoor Adventure; **Daphne Puttock**, Water Safety Advisor, The Guide Association; **Andy Rangecroft**, Head of Ulley Activity Centre, Rotherham Youth Service; **Shileen Tarpey**, Lecturer in Health and Physical Recreation Studies, Liverpool Hope University College; **Geoff Thompson**, Founder and Chairman, Youth Charter for Sport; **Simon Vandeleur**, Lieutenant Colonel, HQ Initial Training Group; **Heather White**, Head of Physical Education, Park House School, Newbury; **Dick Whitfield**, Chief Probation Officer, Kent Probation Service; **Geoffrey Williams**, Director of Studies, St Catharine's; **Douglas Wilson**, Bursar, St Catharine's.

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